

What is claimed is:

1. An imitation cheese composition comprising:

- a) moisture in an amount that is at least 60% by weight of the composition,
- b) an acidulent in an amount that causes a pH of the composition to be not greater than 4.6,
- c) a hydrocolloid,
- d) a cheese-derived component in an amount less than about 15% by weight of the composition, and
- e) cheese flavoring, wherein the cheese flavoring is natural or artificial,

the composition being sufficiently firm such that it can be at least one of sliced, cut, shredded or grated.

2. The composition according to claim 1, wherein the moisture is present in an amount that is greater than 70% by weight of the composition.

3. The composition according to claim 1, wherein the acidulent is in a total titrateable amount of less than 1.5% by weight of the composition such that the pH of the composition is not greater than 4.6.

4. The composition according to claim 1, wherein the acidulent is in a total titrateable amount of less than 1% by weight of the composition such that the pH of the composition is not greater than 4.6.

5. The composition according to claim 1, wherein the acidulent is in a total titrateable amount of less than 0.5% by weight of the composition such that the pH of the composition is not greater than 4.6.

6. The composition according to claim 1, wherein the acidulent is present in an amount not more than about 1.5% equivalents of glacial acetic acid by weight of the composition.

7. The composition according to claim 1, wherein the acidulent is selected from the group consisting of cultured dextrose, glucono- δ -lactone, phosphoric acid and lactic acid.

8. The composition according to claim 1, wherein the pH is about 2 to about 4.5.

9. The composition according to claim 1, wherein the hydrocolloid is present in an amount of at least 0.01% by weight of the composition.

10. The composition according to claim 1, wherein the hydrocolloid is selected from the group consisting of agar, alginate, carrageenan, gelatin, guar gum, locust bean gum, pectin and xanthan gum.

11. The composition according to claim 1, further comprising a protein in an amount less than 1% by weight of the composition.

12. The composition according to claim 11, wherein the protein is present in an amount of about 0.2% by weight to about 0.5% by weight of the composition.

13. The composition according to claim 11, wherein the protein is selected from the group consisting of gelatin, whey protein, soy protein, egg protein and hydrolyzed vegetable protein.

14. The composition according to claim 11, wherein the protein has an average isoelectric point (pI) of at least about 5.

15. The composition of claim 1, wherein the cheese-derived component is present in an amount of at least 0.1% by weight of the composition.

16. The composition of claim 1, further comprising no more than about 1% by weight of the composition of a protein, other than the cheese-derived ingredient, having an average isoelectric point (pI) of at least about 5.

17. The composition of claim 16, wherein the protein is one which has a buffering capacity such that a 1.0% solution of the protein in deionized water requires no more than about 0.3 moles of acetic acid to change the pH of the solution by one pH unit.

18. The composition according to claim 1, further comprising a fat, other than the cheese-derived component.

19. The composition according to claim 18, wherein the fat is present as a fat phase dispersed and mobilized within the hydrocolloid.

20. The composition according to claim 18, wherein the fat is selected from the group consisting of soybean oil, canola oil, sunflower oil, safflower oil, palm kernel oil, coconut oil, olive oil and butterfat.

21. The composition of claim 18, wherein the fat is present in an amount of at least about 5% by weight of the composition.

22. The composition of claim 1, wherein the cheese flavoring is selected from the group consisting of enzyme modified cheese, enzyme modified Tactile products, and synthetic flavors.

23. The composition according to claim 1, wherein the composition has a fracturability of about 9.8 N at 21° C.

24. The composition of claim 1, further comprising a chemical emulsifier in an amount up to about 5% by weight of the composition.

25. The composition of claim 24, wherein the chemical emulsifier is selected from the group consisting of monoglycerides, diglycerides, polysorbates, sodium stearoyl lactylate, and diacetyl tartaric acid esters of mono- and di-glycerides (DATEM).

26. An imitation cheese composition comprising:

- a) moisture in an amount that is at least 70% by weight of the composition,
- b) an acidulent in an amount that causes a pH of the composition to be not greater than 4.6,
- c) a hydrocolloid, and
- d) cheese flavoring, wherein the cheese flavoring is natural or artificial,

the composition being sufficiently firm such that it can be at least one of sliced, cut, shredded or grated.

27. An imitation cheese composition comprising:

- a) moisture,
- b) a hydrocolloid in an amount of about 0.01% to about 40% by weight of the composition,
- c) an acidulent,
- d) a cheese-derived component in an amount of no more than about 15% by weight of the composition, and
- e) cheese flavoring,

wherein the composition has a fracturability of about 4.9 N to about 9.8 N at 21° C. and a pH of not greater than 4.6.